

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# R W A N D A



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

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## MAP OF RWANDA



## A WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations on your invitation to serve with Peace Corps/Rwanda. This Welcome Book will help you understand what to expect over the next few months and in-country, and give you background about Rwanda, its people, and preparing yourself for your work here as a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV). This book is a joint effort by currently serving Volunteers and Peace Corps headquarters to assure that the most salient points are covered. Please flesh out this information through Internet searches and old-fashioned background reading.

As you are undoubtedly aware, Rwanda experienced serious ethnic division that culminated in a civil war and a tragic genocide in the 1990s. Rwanda has been working very diligently to heal these scars and has made great strides. I would urge you to understand this past and then do as the vast majority of Rwandans do: Look beyond it to the challenges of the present and the future. Rwanda faces development issues common in sub-Saharan Africa: a limited natural resource base, low levels of working capital, low rates of educational attainment, and significant health challenges. Additionally, Rwanda has a very high population density.

The good news is that Rwanda has dedicated citizens working to create a society of peace, stability, and prosperity. Their government provides leadership in this effort, faces issues directly, and works to foster reconciliation and development. The Rwandan government works closely with the U.S. government, receives American assistance, and has invited the Peace Corps to come to Rwanda to build capacity among the people at the grassroots level.

Rwanda is a fascinating and challenging place to serve as a Volunteer. Things are changing quickly here in some aspects of life. These changes frequently emanate from the center outward—from the capital of Kigali toward other urban areas and then to the countryside—and often from the top down, with strong direction from the government (see the Vision 2020 plan [http://www.gesci.org/assets/files/Rwanda\\_Vision\\_2020.pdf](http://www.gesci.org/assets/files/Rwanda_Vision_2020.pdf)). Peace Corps/Rwanda's two projects in Community Health and Education contribute directly to Vision 2020, as you will learn in pre-service training (PST). This is the work of Goal 1 of the Peace Corps: Helping people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.

At the same time, some aspects of Rwanda and life here are changing very slowly, as you might anticipate if you have studied about developing societies and cultural change. In the majority of the small communities in which you will serve, language, food habits, gender relations, housing, and other elements of traditional culture may be adapting to outside influence and internal forces too slowly to notice. Rwanda's recent emergence as a country is reflected in its integration to global markets, itself a function of the country's geography, colonial history, and culture. One measure of this is the DHL Global Connectedness Index ([www.dhl.com/gci](http://www.dhl.com/gci)). Rwanda is ranked near the bottom of this index.

You will have an assignment to contribute to Rwanda's global connectedness as part of Goal 2 of Peace Corps: Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of peoples served. As an American, whatever your ethnic, religious, or regional background, you have certain traits and attitudes about the future, justice, equality, and work that you bring with you as a "culture bearer." Rwandans will want to learn about these. This will help Rwandans make their own decisions about cultural change, what they find desirable, and what they will choose to reject. Please do not undervalue the importance of this contribution from your service.

In preparation for an arduous three months of PST and then for two years of service as a PCV, I urge you to pay close attention to two documents you will receive soon. The first is your Volunteer assignment description. This will tell you in brief what your job will be during your two years of service. You will get more detail during PST and are expected to commit to this work.

The second document is the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook. You will receive the most current version during staging. All Volunteers worldwide receive this and it forms the basic guidance of how Peace Corps operates and your relationship to the agency. I urge you to read this thoroughly. (It is a long plane ride to Rwanda!) Note that you will also receive a Rwanda-specific Volunteer Handbook that tiers to the worldwide handbook. These are important. Read and follow the guidance in them.

The final piece I want you to read carefully and to commit to is the Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers. This is in the aforementioned worldwide handbook on page v at the very beginning as well as on Page 8 of this Welcome Book. Commit to the Core Expectations before you get on the plane to Rwanda.

A final note: So far I have made this sound pretty daunting. It is daunting. At the same time, for most people it is one of their most rewarding and often life-changing experiences. You will not be doing this alone. You will have a new group of friends through your training cohort, whom you will meet at staging. You will have the support, guidance, and mutual respect of the staff of Peace Corps/Rwanda. You will learn Kinyarwanda, the key to unlocking the doors and treasure chests of experience in Rwanda. Rwandans are for the most part reserved and you will often need to greet them first, smile first, and put yourself out there. As you gain confidence in operating through the language and within the culture, you will find Rwandans smile and laugh often, find you a never-ending source of fascination (and often entertainment), and eventually embrace you as a friend. It will be worth it.

Steve Miller

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# CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps Mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to:

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship, if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others
9. Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America
10. Represent responsively the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service

# **PEACE CORPS/RWANDA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS**

## **History of the Peace Corps in Rwanda**

The first group of Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Rwanda in 1975. Programming started with three Volunteers working in university education, and later expanded into fisheries and agriculture. However, due to a limited number of requests for Volunteers from the government of Rwanda, the Peace Corps withdrew its permanent staff and the small program was managed with the help of the U.S. Embassy.

In 1985 and 1986, program assessments indicated that there was potential for expansion of the Peace Corps program, particularly in areas of forestry and cooperative extension. With growth in mind, the Peace Corps sent a permanent representative to Rwanda in 1987. In 1988, an associate Peace Corps director was added to enhance programming. In addition to the original programs in university education, agriculture, and fisheries, Peace Corps/Rwanda began new initiatives in conservation and health. However, in February 1993, severe political instability in Rwanda led to the evacuation of all Volunteers. The office eventually closed in April 1994. All records were burned by the U.S. Embassy, leaving very little documentation of Peace Corps operations from 1975–93.

On July 15, 2007, the first assessment team traveled to Rwanda to explore the viability of re-establishing Peace Corps operations. From the initial meetings it became clear that both the community and the current government of Rwanda were eager to welcome the Peace Corps back to the country. On July 18, 2008, U.S. Ambassador Michael Arietti and Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Rwanda Amandin Rugira signed an agreement officially re-establishing the U.S. Peace Corps program in Rwanda.

## **History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Rwanda**

The first group of Peace Corps Volunteers worked in the areas of education, agriculture, and health until 1993, when the eruption of political and ethnic conflict escalated into a genocide in which hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were killed. Rwanda has since emerged as a unique example of cross-ethnic healing and post-conflict reconstruction. The government of Rwanda (GoR) is actively looking to the future, and it has requested the assistance of Peace Corps Volunteers to help carry out its Vision 2020 and decentralization plan, which strongly focuses on community development, health, and HIV/AIDS.

HIV prevalence in Rwanda is estimated to be 3.1 percent among adults ages 15–49. According to statistics, urban areas have higher HIV prevalence than rural areas, and women are at higher risk of HIV infection than men. Young women ages 15–24 are twice as likely to be infected with HIV as young men in the same age group. The GoR and its

partners, including The President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the World Bank, and the Global Fund, are working to improve and expand HIV/AIDS services. As the availability of health services expands to deal with malaria (with support from the President's Malaria Initiative) and HIV/AIDS, and family planning and maternal and child health services improve, strategies to increase the demand for these services are needed. There is also a need to strengthen linkages among communities, health facilities, and other service providers to promote behavior change and to adopt healthier lifestyles. In addition, officials managing administrative offices at the local governmental level frequently lack adequate training to perform their duties at full capacity, and civil society in Rwanda is relatively new and weak.

With the signing of the 2008 agreement, Peace Corps/Rwanda re-established its presence with a public health project. An initial group of 35 Volunteers collaborated with other U.S. government partners to develop the capacity of local health centers and community-based organizations to plan, coordinate, and deliver HIV/AIDS services. Health Volunteers work with various partners, including Rwandan administrative authorities, international organizations, and other private sector partners at the district, sector, and cell levels to strengthen their efforts in HIV education, prevention, and care activities. Volunteers also work with partners to build the capacity of HIV/AIDS-focused organizations by providing assistance in the areas of strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and project development. The long-term objective of the work undertaken by Health Volunteers is that people and families living with AIDS will have increased access to prevention, care, and treatment services, and that the care they have access to is comprehensive and provided by a strengthened network of governmental and civil service providers.

In late 2009, Peace Corps/Rwanda added an education component to the program. Education Volunteers work with secondary schools (the American equivalent of middle and high schools) to teach English, math, science, and information technology. In addition to teaching in the classroom, Education Volunteers help mentor other teachers on education methodology and learner-centered education techniques. They also work outside of the schools on secondary projects that include sports clubs, study skills mentoring, library development, youth life skills training, HIV/AIDS prevention, and small income-generating projects. Education Volunteers have been a valuable resource during the Rwandan government's shift from French to English as the language of instruction in schools and in their efforts to provide the first nine years of education for all students.

With the addition of the Education sector, the Peace Corps/Rwanda program has grown from the first 35 Health Volunteers to a total of about 110 Volunteers, with about two-thirds being serving in the Education sector.



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: RWANDA AT A GLANCE

## History

In pre-colonial Rwandan society, the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa peoples spoke the same language, followed the same cultural practices, and occasionally intermarried. The Tutsi were traditionally cattle herders, while the Hutu were generally farmers. Because cattle were the dominant form of disposal capital, the Tutsi were better positioned to exert economic power and influence. What is important to know is that the classifications of Hutu and Tutsi were economically founded and it was possible to move from one group to the other. It was not until colonialism that Hutu and Tutsi became designated ethnic groups. The economic leverage of the Tutsi led to political dominance and a line of Tutsi bwami (kings) gradually consolidated power until a “unified” Rwandan state evolved in the latter half of the 19th century under Mwami Kigeli Rwabugiri (Kigeli IV). While the Hutu may have been excluded from the highest levels of power, they still exercised some influence at the middle and lower levels by being incorporated into the political system as part of the hierarchy of chiefs who administered the districts and hills. The “chief of the pastures” would usually be a Tutsi and the “chief of the land,” in charge of agricultural matters, would usually be a Hutu.

After the Berlin Conference of 1884, Rwanda was placed under the German “sphere of interest” and the first German explorers arrived in Rwanda in 1894. Germany entered into a series of treaties with the Tutsi kings that placed Rwanda in a “protectorate” status beginning in 1899. Using the existing political systems, Germany exercised indirect administrative control through the kings. Similar indirect administration was exercised over the kingdom of Burundi. Early European civil servants and missionaries adhered to the so-called “Hamitic thesis,” which espoused that the African “Hamites” were a branch of the Caucasian race because they bore closer physical resemblance to Europeans than other sub-Saharan Africans (being taller and having finer features and typically lighter skin). The “Hamites” were thought to be more intelligent and, therefore, worthy of positions of leadership. In Rwanda, the Tutsi were judged to be “Hamites” and they received preferential treatment from the Germans. During World War I, Belgian troops evicted German forces from Rwanda and Burundi, and Belgian control of the region was formalized in a 1922 League of Nations mandate that joined the two kingdoms as Ruanda-Urundi. The Belgians continued to operate on the basis of the Hamitic hypothesis and, by the end of the 1920s, they had instituted a process to systematically give preferential status to the Tutsi, both in education and in politics. In the 1930s the Belgians began a process of “Tutsification” that replaced the Hutu chiefs and deputy chiefs at the district and hill level with Tutsi. In 1933, the Belgians introduced identity cards that classified each person as Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa. This distinction is reported to have been largely based on the number of cattle a person owned. Physical anatomy was also used to classify the first two groups:

Tutsis were deemed to be tall with more Caucasian noses, while Hutus were thought to be short with flat noses. In the late 1950s, the Hutu majority began to demand representation proportional to their numbers and political parties were formed based on ethnic lines. The most influential group was the Party of the Hutu Emancipation Movement (PARMEHUTU), although there were other Hutu and Tutsi parties formed at the same time. The 1957 Bahutu Manifesto asserted that the problems of Rwanda were due to Belgian rule and a basic conflict between Hutu and the “Hamitic foreigners” (Tutsi). In 1959, the Belgian government announced that it was planning to grant independence to Rwanda and began to dismantle the Tutsi-dominated political structures that it had supported. When politically inspired ethnic violence broke out, it quickly led to a widespread Hutu pogrom, sometimes referred to as “the first genocide.” Hundreds of thousands of Tutsi were killed and an estimated 160,000 Tutsi fled to Uganda, Congo, Tanzania, and Burundi between 1959–61. The Belgians then appointed approximately 300 Hutu to replace Tutsi chiefs and sub-chiefs who had been killed, deposed, or simply fled during the uprising. Belgium then established a new indigenous military force based on ethnic proportionality: 85 percent Hutu, 15 percent Tutsi.

After Mwami Kigeli V was deposed during the 1959 insurrection, a U.N.-supervised referendum in September 1961 abolished the monarchy, and the simultaneous parliamentary elections resulted in a Hutu majority government. PARMEHUTU founder Grégoire Kayibanda was elected by the Parliament to become Rwanda’s first president in October 1961, and Belgium granted internal autonomy to the Kayibanda government in January 1962. The U.N. terminated the Belgian mandate in July 1962, and Ruanda-Urundi was split into two countries, Rwanda and Burundi. Almost immediately, armed groups of Tutsi refugees in neighboring countries began a series of incursions against the Hutu-led Rwandan government. These attacks incited reprisals against Tutsi still in Rwanda. The Tutsi leaders who had remained in Rwanda were executed without trial, effectively destroying the two Tutsi political parties and ending Tutsi participation in government at all levels.

Ethnic violence erupted again in 1973, but soon deteriorated into general chaos. In July 1973, Kayibanda was overthrown in a military coup led by Maj. Gen. Juvenal Habyarimana, who dissolved both the National Assembly and the PARMEHUTU Party and abolished all political activity. President Habyarimana established a one-party political system in 1975 known as the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND). Elections in 1978 saw the adoption of a new constitution, and Habyarimana was confirmed as president. He was reelected in 1983 and again in 1988, but in 1990, Habyarimana faced pressure for political reform and announced his intention to transition to a multiparty democracy.

The Habyarimana government refused to allow Tutsi refugees to return to Rwanda, citing that Rwanda was “full” and there was no room for refugees to settle. This incited the Tutsi refugees in Uganda to form what became known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in

1987. The RPF had a military wing known as the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), whose fighters had been trained by the Ugandan Army. The RPA launched its first attacks into Rwanda in October 1990, initiating a civil war. In July 1992, negotiations began in Arusha, Tanzania, between the RPF and the Rwandan government. On April 6, 1994, the airplane carrying President Habyarimana and the president of Burundi was shot down on an approach to Kigali, killing both. Almost immediately, the Rwandan military and military-trained youth militia groups known as Interahamwe set up roadblocks around Kigali and began assassinating opposition politicians, including Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana (and the 10 Belgian U.N. soldiers assigned to protect her). Next targeted were “moderate” politicians and civilians (both Hutu and Tutsi), such as journalists, human rights activists, representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and civil servants. The killing spread quickly across the country, eventually becoming a generalized massacre of Tutsis. It is estimated that between 800,000 and 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered.

In response to the killings, the RPA renewed its offensive, ultimately routing the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), which fled, along with the Interahamwe, to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As many as 2 million Rwandans, mainly Hutu, sought refuge in DRC, Tanzania, and Burundi, either out of fear of reprisal killings or because of coercion by génocidaires (those who had committed acts of genocide). Another 1 million people were displaced internally. The RPF, led by Maj. Gen. Paul Kagame, gained control of Kigali on July 4, 1994, and the war ended on July 16. A new government was formed under President Pasteur Bizimungu, a moderate Hutu who had been a member of the RPF. Kagame became Minister of Defense and established the RPF as the Rwandan National Army.

Meanwhile, in the refugee camps in DRC, génocidaires began to assert control and reorganize. In 1995, the DRC army, rogue militias, and Rwandan Hutu extremists launched attacks against the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese of eastern DRC. In 1996, Rwanda invaded DRC in response to these attacks, targeting Hutu strongholds in the refugee camps and seeking to liberate and repatriate Rwandan refugees. As a result of his support for the pre-genocide Hutu government, DNC President Mobutu Sese Seko was deposed by Rwandan and Ugandan forces that installed Laurent Kabila as president. As a result of the continuing DRC support for the extremist Hutu groups, Rwanda again intervened militarily and began active support of Congolese rebels seeking to displace Kabila. Rwandan President Bizimungu resigned in 2000 amid political infighting, prompting ministers and members of Parliament to elect then-Vice President Paul Kagame as Rwanda’s next president. In 2002, Rwanda signed a peace agreement with the DRC and withdrew the remainder of its forces. A new constitution was adopted in May 2003 and, a few months later, Kagame won Rwanda’s first democratic presidential election by a landslide. Kagame was reelected to a second term in 2010.



## Government

The Republic of Rwanda has an elected government comprised of a president, a prime minister, and a bicameral Parliament. Rwanda's first presidential elections were held in 2003. Presidents serve a term of seven years. The two houses of Parliament are the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Members are both elected and appointed: some by the president, some by local councils, some by targeted groups such as tertiary educational institutions and youth and disabled-persons organizations, and some by popular vote. The 26 senators are elected for eight-year terms, and the 80 deputies are elected for five-year terms.

In 2006, the government completed a nationwide redistricting and decentralization process that reduced the size of the ministries and reduced the government bureaucracy across the country. In doing so, four provinces (plus the city of Kigali) were established. They are the Northern Province, Western Province, Eastern Province, and Southern Province. The new administrative divisions are national, provincial (intara), district (akarere), sector (umurenge), and cell (akagari). Below the cell level is the umudugudu, which is a village. There are administrators at every level. At the very lowest level, there are nyumbakumi, who were traditionally responsible for 10 houses and can now be responsible for up to 150 houses (or more).

In the redistricting process, many of the districts and major towns were renamed, but Rwandans still refer to these places by both names. The major regional towns are Gitarama (Muhanga), Ruhengeri (Musanze), Gisenyi (Rubavu), Butare (Huye), Kibungo, Rwamagana, and Cyangugu (Rusizi).

## Economy

The current government of Rwanda, (the Government of National Unity) inherited an economy completely destroyed by genocide and mismanagement over three decades. Some regions had been deliberately prevented from realizing their economic potential for purely political reasons. The new Rwandan government, since the genocide in 1994, has pushed forward with national rehabilitation and has brought inflation down from 64 percent in 1994 to 5.4 percent in 2012. The estimated GDP for 2012 was \$6.95 billion with the GDP per capita (PPP) at roughly \$1,400, making Rwanda 203rd for GDP per capita in the world overall.

In addition, Rwanda has joined the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and has been operating within a free trade zone with 13 of the 19 member states. Tea provides 60 percent of export earnings, with coffee and pyrethrum, a plant extract used in insecticides, providing much of the rest. The government is also implementing structural adjustment programs that aim to eliminate public sector inefficiency and waste and strengthen the economy. Privatization of government enterprises is well underway and more than 50 enterprises have been put up for

privatization. Most sectors of the economy have surpassed pre-war productivity levels. The main towns around the country have been experiencing an unprecedented construction boom—evidence of confidence in the economy by investors.

The official currency of Rwanda is the Rwandan franc (RWF). Coins are minted in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 francs and bills are printed in denominations of 500, 1,000, 2,000, and 5,000 francs. The exchange rate to the U.S. dollar is currently about 630 RWF to \$1 and commonly fluctuates between 600 RWF and 650 RWF to \$1.

## **People and Culture**

Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa. This is most evident in the volcanic northern regions of Musanze (formerly Ruhengeri) and Rubavu (formerly Gisenyi). As of 2011, the World Bank estimated Rwanda's population to be nearly 11 million. It is also estimated that the population will double by 2030. With limited land and an increasing population, the government has taken on family planning as a national issue.

The Rwandan people are working to heal the wounds of war, and the government has implemented a policy that ethnicity (Hutu, Tutsi, Twa) no longer exists in Rwanda, and that Rwandans are one united people. As a result, it is now unlawful to discuss the ethnic groups. Reconciliation plays a significant role in Rwandan society, from the mandatory gacaca councils to reconciliation camps for youth. The national reconciliation effort is coordinated by the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC). Every year, the genocide is remembered during Genocide Memorial Week, which begins April 6. Many people do not work, or work half-days, during this week. Music unrelated to the genocide and dancing are discouraged, and lectures, discussions, and screenings of films on the Rwandan genocide are held across the country. The government feels strongly that in order to prevent such atrocities from happening again, everyone must remember and mourn each year.

Rwandans tend to be somewhat more reserved than other peoples in East Africa, partially because of culture and partially because of history. While always very friendly and generous, Rwandans are generally cautious about developing close relationships. Once accepted, Rwandans treat close friends like family. As a culture that cherishes discussion, social activities and traditional rituals often center on drinks and conversation.

The Rwandan culture, while traditionally paternalistic, is becoming increasingly egalitarian. Women continue to assume the traditional roles of raising children and taking care of the home, but they also work in the fields and perform manual labor. In Rwanda's cities, it is not uncommon to see female police officers. The government has made it a priority to increase the status of women. With more than half of the Parliament's seats occupied by female lawmakers, Rwanda boasts the highest percentage of women lawmakers in the world. Its constitution formally calls for women to comprise 30 percent of the Parliament and other levels of government.

As a culture that values cattle, milk and milk products (amata) can be found throughout the country. The most popular are inshyushyu (drinking milk) and ikivuguto (drinkable yogurt). While cows can be found everywhere, the vast majority are in the Eastern Province, where the land is less densely populated and there is more room for cattle to graze.

Traditional Rwandan dance is performed by Intore dancers. The Intore often perform for weddings and other joyous occasions. Both men and women dance (generally, but not always, separately). Men dress as warriors, with long headdresses of natural white fibers and bells around their ankles. Women dress in mushananas, long gossamer dresses that tie over one shoulder, with bells around their ankles as well.

Rwanda has three official national languages: Kinyarwanda, English, and French. As a former Belgian colony, French has historically been the language of educated Rwandans. However, over the past several years, in part because of a large Rwandan population returning from Uganda, there has been a major push toward English. In 2008, English was accepted as the official language of instruction for all government schools. As the Rwandan government moves rapidly toward economic and social development, it has targeted information technology and human resource development as its major priorities. English is perceived as essential for achieving these goals. Rwanda has also begun to move closer to its East African neighbors, joining the East African Community, whose official language is English.

## **Environment**

Rwanda is a landlocked country situated in Eastern Africa. Also known as “the land of a thousand hills,” Rwanda has six volcanoes, 23 lakes, and numerous rivers, some forming one source of the Nile River. The country lies 75 miles south of the equator in the Tropic of Capricorn, 880 miles west of the Indian Ocean, and 1,250 miles east of the Atlantic Ocean. Rwanda is bordered by Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. Rwanda boasts a wide variety of wildlife, and its northern region is home to the world’s largest number of endangered mountain gorillas, which can be viewed in their natural mountain habitats at a fairly close range. In addition, 670 bird species have been recorded in the country.

The climate of Rwanda is made up of two wet seasons and two dry seasons. The short wet season lasts from October to November, and the main rainy season lasts from mid-March to the end of May. During the dry seasons, which last from December to mid-March and from June to the end of August, frequent light cloud cover yields a pleasant, never stifling, temperature. The average temperature in Kigali, the capital city, is 19 degrees Celsius (66 Fahrenheit) with 40 inches of rainfall annually. The sun shines nearly year round, and the mean daily temperatures are close to 24 C (76 F). The lowest nighttime temperature is around 10 C (50 F) and the highest daytime temperature is about 34 C (94 F).

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps, Rwanda, and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit your local library. Libraries offer free Internet usage and often let you print information to take home.

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own experience, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and we hope you will keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

### General Information About Rwanda

#### **[www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com)**

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the capital of Rwanda to how to convert from the dollar to the Rwanda currency. Just click on Rwanda and go from there.

#### **[www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations)**

Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

#### **[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)**

The State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Rwanda and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

#### **[www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm](http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm)**

This includes links to all the official sites for governments worldwide.

#### **[www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm](http://www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm)**

This online world atlas includes maps and geographical information, and each country page contains links to other sites, such as the Library of Congress, that contain comprehensive historical, social, and political background.

#### **[www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp)**

This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states of the U.N.

**[www.worldinformation.com](http://www.worldinformation.com)**

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

## **Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

### **Facebook**

It is common for each training group to have their own Facebook group. If you have Facebook, you can often search for your training's class page or group with the following name, "Peace Corps Rwanda (insert month and year here)." You can also be the first to create such a group. The Facebook group is a great place to meet other invitees in your training group prior to staging, ask questions, and share ideas. Current Volunteers and your past Volunteer leaders frequent the group and can be a great source of information.

**[www.rpcv.org](http://www.rpcv.org)**

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the "Friends of" groups for most countries of service, comprised of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities. Or go straight to the Friends of Rwanda site: Insert link

**[www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org](http://www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org)**

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

**[www.peacecorpswriters.org](http://www.peacecorpswriters.org)**

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

**[www.peacecorpsjournals.com](http://www.peacecorpsjournals.com)**

Peace Corps Journals is a website that lists Volunteers' blogs by country. It is a great way to get a feel for a specific country, the Volunteer lifestyle, and Volunteer work. Don't forget to add your own blog if you have one.

## Recommended Books about Rwanda

- Kinzer, Stephen. *A Thousand Hills: Rwanda's Rebirth and The Man Who Dreamed It*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.
- Dallaire, Gen. Roméo. *Shake Hands With The Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005.
- Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998.
- Courtemanche, Gil. *Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Power, Samantha. *A Problem From Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.
- Berkeley. *The Graves Are Not Yet Full*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Hatzfeld, Jean. *Machete Season*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005.
- Fossey, Dian. *Gorillas in the Mist*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983.
- Carr, Rosamond. *Land of a Thousand Hills: My Life in Rwanda*. New York: Viking, 1999.
- Newbury, Catharine. *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda 1860-1960*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Prunier, Gerard. *The Rwandan Crisis: History of a Genocide*. Columbia University Press. 1995.
- Weber, William and Vedder, Amy. *In the Kingdom of the Gorilla*. Simon & Schuster. 2002

## Recommended Films About Rwanda

- "Sometimes in April," 2005 HBO
- "Frontline: Ghosts of Rwanda," 2004 Frontline
- "100 Days," 2001 Broadcast Feature Facilities Ltd.
- "Hotel Rwanda," 2004 Lions Gate Films
- "Shake Hands With The Devil," 2007 Barna-Alper Prod'n
- "Gorillas in the Mist," 1998 Universal Pictures
- "As We Forgive," 2008 Image Bearer Pictures
- "Kinyarwanda," 2010
- "Shooting Dogs" released in the U.S. as "Beyond the Gates," 2005

## Books About the History of the Peace Corps

- Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
- Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.
- Meisler, Stanley. *When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2011.

## Books on the Volunteer Experience

- Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
- Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
- Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
- Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.
- Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
- Thompson, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).





# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

## Communications

### Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service available in the United States. Mail takes a minimum of two weeks to arrive in Rwanda. Some mail may simply not arrive (fortunately, this is not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen). Please be aware of the reality of mail service in the developing world. Remember, when someone is thousands of miles away from families and friends, communication can become a very sensitive issue. Advise your family and friends to number their letters and to include “Airmail” and “Par Avion” on their envelopes.

The amount of time it takes for mail to reach Volunteers is as varied as their sites. Airmail from the United States to major cities in Rwanda usually takes about two weeks. More remote post offices receive mail less frequently, and sometimes a local courier is employed to ferry mail from isolated villages to trading centers.

You are strongly encouraged to write to your family regularly (perhaps weekly or biweekly) and to number your letters. Family members will typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so please advise your parents, friends, and relatives that mail is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly. Many Volunteers, however, are replacing mail with digital communication, and choose to talk to the friends and family using cell phones or online solutions like Skype. That said, never underestimate the power of a written letter.

Packages normally take about two to three months to reach Rwanda from the United States if sent via surface mail. Volunteers are requested to follow the mailing procedures described in the Peace Corps/Rwanda Volunteer Handbook.

Your address during training will be as follows:

PC/Rwanda  
B.P. 5657  
Kigali, Rwanda

It is your responsibility to forward the postal address at your site (once you know it) to your family and friends. Remember that it is important to keep in regular contact with relatives and friends, not just for them but also for you. A lapse in contact for any period of time can cause your family and friends to worry, so write often.

Once at your site, you will receive a notification slip in your post box when you receive a package. Respond promptly: The sooner you pick up the package, the cheaper storage fees will be.

Trainees and Volunteers are responsible for mailing personal letters and packages. Airmail letters and stamps are available at local post offices.

## **Telephones**

Cellular telephones and services are available in Rwanda, especially in Kigali and larger towns. SIM cards are inexpensive and can be found in every regional capital. The Peace Corps strongly encourages Volunteers to purchase a cell phone as this will be your main form of communication during pre-service training and helps you connect with family and friends in the States. Time is set aside in-country prior to pre-service training to buy a phone if needed. If you plan on purchasing a cell phone in-country, make sure to bring extra American cash so that you have sufficient money in the beginning.

Cell coverage is relatively ubiquitous, although there are some Volunteers who do not have adequate coverage at their sites and must walk a short distance to make a call.

Most large cities and provincial capitals have domestic long-distance service; regional centers and some large cities also provide overseas telephone service. In some locations, the service is fast and efficient; in others, it may take several hours for calls to get through.

Domestic calls: Volunteers are responsible for all toll charges on calls, but you may call the Peace Corps/Kigali office collect or reverse charges in an emergency. Peace Corps/Rwanda provides a monthly telecommunications allowance to cover official and emergency phone calls as part of a Volunteer's living allowance.

Overseas calls: Volunteers are responsible for personal overseas calls, which can be made from their cell phones for a higher charge per minute. Many Volunteers choose to call home and ask their families to call them back on their cell phones, as cell phones can make and receive international calls. Official overseas calls will be facilitated by the Peace Corps office in Kigali.

## **Computer, Internet, and Email Access**

While the Peace Corps does not require you to bring a computer, many Volunteers find one very useful for work and leisure. Email is a common and efficient form of communication among Volunteers.

Internet access is available at post offices and cybercafés in towns and cities, but can be slow and costly. The largest cell phone-service providers also sell USB modems that connect to the cellular network to deliver Internet to your computer anywhere a signal can be obtained. However, Internet access is improving rapidly and many Volunteers find ways to access it on a routine basis. Because Internet use is primarily for personal reasons, you are expected to cover your Internet costs. Designated computers in the Information Resource Center at the Peace Corps/Rwanda office have

Internet access, which you are welcome to use. Volunteers are prohibited from using staff computers in the Peace Corps offices.

## **Housing and Site Location**

As a Volunteer, you will most likely live in a rural community or small town, and may not have access to indoor plumbing or electricity. Expect to use lamps and candles for lighting and to cook using a single-burner kerosene stove, wood, or charcoal. The standards and conditions of Volunteer housing vary widely, from mud houses to very modern cement houses with running water and electricity. The type of house you have will depend on your project, the area of the country to which you are posted, and the types of houses available in the community. You may also be required to share housing with other staff from your Rwandan organization or to live in a room behind a shop at a market center. You can expect to have, at the very least, a room to call your own. The decision as to whether housing standards are “acceptable” lies with the Peace Corps staff. When it comes to your housing, you should not lose sight of the guiding goal of the Peace Corps. Maintain your focus on service to the people of Rwanda and not on the level of your accommodations.

Because Peace Corps Volunteers are often posted in poor rural areas to work with communities with little or no money for housing, the Peace Corps sets minimum housing standards:

- There must be at least a private, lockable room if housing is shared with other people.
- The room should have windows.
- The roof should not leak.
- There should be a cement floor and a private place for a Volunteer to take a bucket bath or shower.
- There should be a latrine that is private or semiprivate (not used by all schoolchildren at a school, but perhaps shared by other staff members).
- The Volunteer will be expected to use the same water source as the community.

Your site assignment is made during pre-service training, in collaboration with the training and programming staff. The assignment is based on their assessment and recommendation regarding community needs and your skill levels in the technical, cross-cultural, and language areas. You will be interviewed prior to an actual placement decision so additional personal preferences can be considered in making the site assignment. Site placements are made using the following criteria (in priority order):

- Medical considerations
- Government of Rwanda needs

- Site requirements (community needs) matched with demonstrated technical, cross-cultural, and language skills
- Peace Corps/Rwanda needs
- Personal preference of the trainee

The final decisions on site placement are made by the Peace Corps staff. If you choose not to go to the site assigned to you, you will be given the opportunity to terminate your service with the Peace Corps.

## **Living Allowance and Money Management**

Each Volunteer receives a monthly living allowance sufficient to cover basic costs. The allowance enables you to live adequately according to the Peace Corps philosophy of a modest lifestyle. It is based on the local cost of living and is paid in local currency. Your living allowance is intended to cover food, housing, clothing, official transportation, utilities, household supplies, recreation and entertainment, incidental personal expenses, communications, and reading material.

## **Food and Diet**

In most parts of Rwanda there is a wide choice of foods, ranging from fresh fruits and vegetables (such as cabbage, avocados, mangoes, bananas, pineapples, carrots, and passion fruit) to starches (such as potatoes, plantains, corn, rice, and cassava) to meats (primarily goat and beef, with some chicken and fish). Even so, the average Rwandan diet tends to be somewhat plain and high in starches, but with a little creativity you can enjoy a varied diet. Fruits and vegetables are seasonal, which means some items may not be available at all times. Vegetarian Volunteers will have little difficulty in continuing their diets after becoming familiar with local food items and their preparation.

## **Transportation**

All Volunteers will be expected to travel in Rwanda using local transportation (i.e., foot, public buses, or vans). The Peace Corps will provide bicycles to Volunteers who can use them for transportation at their sites (not all sites or Volunteers are compatible with bicycle transportation). Volunteers are required to wear helmets when riding such bicycles.

Volunteers may not own or operate motorized vehicles.

## **Social Activities**

The most common form of entertainment is socializing among friends and neighbors. Some Volunteers visit other Volunteers on weekends and holidays. The Peace Corps encourages Volunteers to remain at their sites as much as possible to develop relationships with

community members, but also recognizes the need to make occasional trips to regional centers and to visit friends.

You will find it easy to make friends in your community and to participate in weddings, funerals, birthday celebrations, and other social events. It is impossible to overemphasize the rewards of establishing rapport with one's supervisors, co-workers, and other community members. A sincere effort to learn the local language will greatly facilitate these interactions.

## **Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior**

Volunteers will find that most Rwandans are very hard working. They expect the same of all foreigners, including Volunteers, and expect them to conduct themselves in a mature and professional manner.

The business culture in Rwanda presents a unique set of challenges. The Volunteer will need to gain a thorough understanding of the host culture and then work to adapt strategies to fit within acceptable practices. For example, the process of giving direct feedback, which in the United States is expected, may be interpreted as rudeness or disrespect by Rwandan colleagues. Women, particularly young women, and younger Volunteers need to be aware of a very different gender and age dynamic in Rwanda. Gaining the respect of colleagues and traditional leaders may require more effort than you might expect.

Present-day transformations have made managers hesitant to confront issues, provide constructive criticism, or to simply say "no" when they feel it might result in conflict. Volunteers will have to find ways of creating comfortable working relationships at all levels of the organization and in the community.

It is likely that you are curious about the events of 1994, specifically the Genocide, and how the people you will meet and work with survived during that extremely tragic time. Rwandans do have their personal stories about the events of 1994, but it is extremely insensitive to broach this subject or ask questions. Rwandans, although polite and friendly, can be rather reserved about sharing intimate details without first establishing a relationship based on trust. Thus, you should refrain from asking questions about the Genocide, but rather allow people to tell you their stories as they feel comfortable.

Rwandans are conservative in professional and casual attire. It is considered disrespectful to dress too casually or in an untidy manner. The settings in which Volunteers are placed make this a particularly important consideration. Men wear trousers such as chinos or khakis and button-down shirts in work settings. Jackets and ties are occasional requirements. Blue jeans, T-shirts, and very casual sandals are not considered professional attire. Shorts should only be worn when engaged in athletic activities. Women wear

dressess, skirts, or trouser suits with tunic-style tops in both work and leisure environments. Short, low-cut garments are not appropriate for women.

You must be willing to comply with acceptable Rwandan social norms of dress and grooming. This may require that you modify the manner of dress to which you are presently accustomed. Men must wear their hair neat. Dreadlocks are not appropriate. Facial piercings should be kept to a minimum, with discreet studs. Accommodating Rwandan sensitivities in dress and grooming will greatly facilitate your own professional credibility and effectiveness in your assignment.

## **Personal Safety**

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the "Health Care and Safety" chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Rwanda Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Rwanda. Using these tools, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. We encourage Volunteers and families to look at our safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at [www.peacecorps.gov/safety](http://www.peacecorps.gov/safety).

Information on these pages gives messages on Volunteer health and Volunteer safety. There is a section titled "Safety and Security – Our Partnership." Among topics addressed are the risks of serving as a Volunteer, posts' safety support systems, and emergency planning and communications.

## **Rewards and Frustrations**

Challenges are many in this placement. If this were not the case, there would be no need for Volunteers! The Rwandan government has very high expectations for the performance and work of expatriates, even those who are volunteers. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will be expected to act professionally and maturely at all times, as your behavior on and off the job will be noticed. Some challenges Volunteers find difficult to deal with include the psychological aftermath of the genocide; the poverty of many community members; the

overwhelming number of orphans and the difficulty in envisioning how to assist them; issues of death and dying; limited resources, minimal facilities, and the misuse of resources that do exist; hunger among children; beliefs that limit the ability to implement “simple” solutions to enormous problems; too many demands placed by the community; the sense that there is too much to do; the need to slow down and understand; and the lack of organization and collaboration among partner agencies.

It is difficult to share these challenges in such a limited way, as each is so complex. Coping with them, as well as with the challenges that come from daily life, demands flexibility, patience, humility, and good humor. It is not possible for a Volunteer to “fix” things. Volunteers work creatively to get around the fact that there are so few resources available, or that the systems to deliver resources are in their infancy. Volunteers develop relationships with community members, build trust among the various stakeholders in the health system, and find ways to motivate the staffs of health facilities and organizations about their roles in contributing to the well-being of their service areas and communities. Each activity Volunteers become involved in brings its own reward, small steps forward, enjoyable moments, “A ha!” experiences, and a sense of connection. With all the challenges, it is nonetheless universally agreed upon by Volunteers: You gain more than you could ever hope to give.

The AIDS pandemic strikes across all social strata in many Peace Corps countries. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will confront these issues on a very personal level. It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, and violence can have on Volunteers. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might die during your service. Some Volunteers will be meeting and working with people who are HIV-positive and living with AIDS. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, malaria and malnutrition, motor vehicle accidents and other unintentional injuries, domestic violence, alcoholism, and corporal punishment in schools are problems a Volunteer may confront. You will need to anticipate these situations and use supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength, so you can continue to be of service to your community.

Although working in Rwanda can be a tremendously gratifying experience, the new life and job you are considering will be challenging. Please take some time to seriously reflect on your decision to live and work in Rwanda. Working in Rwanda requires great sensitivity and maturity related to the Genocide and you will need to exercise caution when discussing it. As you work and interact on a daily basis with the people of Rwanda, you may notice that almost everyone has a story, and the Genocide (to which most Rwandans refer simply as “the War”) pervades nearly every aspect of society. Working in Rwanda will require an understanding of, and respect for, historical events and their aftermath. Rwanda has made great strides in its reconciliation, but its wounds have not yet fully healed. Genocide memorials, which you will be visiting as part of pre-service training (PST), are scattered

across the country and are integral to understanding the extent of the trauma suffered by the Rwandan people. In an effort to unify the country and, hopefully, make the ethnic divisions a thing of the past, the post-conflict government has instituted a policy that ethnicity no longer exists and that everyone is simply Rwandan. It is illegal in Rwanda to inquire about or discuss ethnicity, as this is perceived as divisive, and one can be prosecuted for doing so.

Finally, while Rwanda is considered to be a peaceful country, you are encouraged to exercise vigilance and use common sense during your service. The Peace Corps strongly discourages cultural or safety-related “adventurism” that can put you at risk.





# PEACE CORPS TRAINING

## Pre-Service Training

The most important function of Peace Corps staff is to provide support for Volunteers. Support does not imply daily supervision of Volunteers' work, nor does it imply assuming parental roles. Volunteer support implies an ongoing interaction between Volunteers and all Peace Corps staff regarding how you handle such matters as your overall adjustment to Rwanda and the Peace Corps, your job assignment, and your community. Your Peace Corps staff is responsible for making regular visits to your site to assist you in any way possible in your orientation in-country.

After you arrive in Rwanda, you will spend a night or two in the capital prior to traveling to the training site. This orientation is designed to introduce you to Peace Corps/Rwanda and its staff and to prepare you to depart for PST.

Training will be busy for everyone. Often you will work over eight hours a day, five or six days a week. Be prepared for a rigorous, full schedule. The principal objectives of training are to provide a learning environment that enables you to develop your language (Kinyarwanda), technical and cultural skills, knowledge, and attitude necessary to work and live in Rwanda.

Pre-service training in Rwanda is accomplished using the community-based training (CBT) model. You will live with a Rwandan host family who will provide you with lodging and food. They will be actively engaged in teaching you both Kinyarwanda and cultural norms and expectations.

Your training will be a mixture of classroom instruction and training in the community, where you will learn by doing and then reflect on your experiences during formal sessions. You will spend time in the field, completing hands-on, practical tasks and participating in group discussions, lectures, and community visits. Most of the training staff will be Rwandan nationals.

## Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Rwanda by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Rwanda experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Rwanda and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Rwanda agencies and organizations that

invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

## **Language Training**

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Rwanda language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

## **Cross-Cultural Training**

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Rwanda host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Rwanda. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

## **Health Training**

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. You will be expected to practice preventive health care and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in Rwanda. Nutrition, mental health, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also covered.

## **Safety Training**

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

## **Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service**

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- **In-service training:** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- **Midterm conference (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service):** Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- **Close-of-service conference:** Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.



## **YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN RWANDA**

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Rwanda maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer, who takes care of Volunteers' primary health care needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Rwanda at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

### **Health Issues in Rwanda**

Rwanda ranks poorly, even for Africa, in terms of health indicators. United Nations Development Program's 2011 Human Development Indicator (HDI) ranks Rwanda 166 out of 185 countries. While great strides have been made in the past few years, life expectancy at birth was still only 55.4 years.

Peace Corps Volunteers may experience health issues such as diarrhea and other gastrointestinal issues, respiratory problems, swelling or discomfort due to insect bites, malaria, malnutrition, and mental health issues. Other health risks include transportation-related injuries and schistosomiasis (a disease contracted when bathing in contaminated freshwater).

### **Helping You Stay Healthy**

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Rwanda, you will receive a medical handbook. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Rwanda will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Rwanda, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

## **Maintaining Your Health**

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The adage “An ounce of prevention ...” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Rwanda is to take the following preventive measures:

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worms, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Rwanda during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV/AIDS or other STDs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Your medical officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

## **Women’s Health Information**

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but also have programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer remains in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps’ medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Rwanda will provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a three-month supply with you.

## Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

### Medical Kit Contents

Ace bandages	Dental floss
Adhesive tape	Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)
American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook	Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)
Antacid tablets (Tums)	Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)	Lip balm (Chapstick)
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)	Oral rehydration salts
Band-Aids	Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)
Butterfly closures	Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)
Calamine lotion	Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)
Cepacol lozenges	Scissors
Condoms	Sterile gauze pads
	Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)
	Tinactin (antifungal cream)
	Tweezers

### Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health – physical, mental, or dental – since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office to obtain a copy of your immunization record and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in Rwanda. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.



Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment – which can take several months – you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you – a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps discourages you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. Most Peace Corps countries do not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health care benefits described in the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.



## **SAFETY AND SECURITY: OUR PARTNERSHIP**

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems.

Beyond knowing that Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you, it might be helpful to see how this partnership works. Peace Corps has policies, procedures, and training in place to promote your safety. We depend on you to follow those policies and to put into practice what you have learned. An example of how this works in practice – in this case to help manage the risk of burglary – is:

- Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work
- Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria
- Peace Corps provides you with resources to take measures such as installing new locks
- Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country authorities in your new community
- Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise
- You lock your doors and windows
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live
- You get to know neighbors
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you
- You don't change residences before being authorized by Peace Corps
- You communicate concerns that you have to Peace Corps staff

### **Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk**

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control. By far the most common crime that Volunteers experience is theft. Thefts often occur when Volunteers are away from their sites, in crowded locations (such as markets or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

Before you depart for Rwanda there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the U.S.
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the U.S.
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Rwanda, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in Rwanda learn to:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Limit alcohol consumption

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Rwanda. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally are less likely to steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns are favorite worksites for pickpockets.

The following are other security concerns in Rwanda of which you should be aware:

Insert potential safety risks in the country

While whistles and exclamations may be fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, abide by local cultural norms, and respond according to the training you will receive.

## **Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime**

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. You can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Rwanda may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating

into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Rwanda will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

## **Support from Staff**

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

## **Crime Data for Rwanda**

Crime data and statistics for Rwanda, which is updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/rwanda>. Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes and crimes that do occur overseas are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities through the local courts system. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to pursue prosecution. If you decide to prosecute, Peace Corps will be there to assist you. One of our tasks is to ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Peace Corps will help you ensure your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country.

If you are the victim of a serious crime, you will learn how to get to a safe location as quickly as possible and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps can provide you with the help you need.

## **Volunteer Safety Support in Rwanda**

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your service and includes the following: information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. Rwanda's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Rwanda office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part in ensuring that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

**Volunteer training** will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Rwanda. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural aspects, health, and other components of training. You will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas, including safety and security, as a condition of service.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and worksites. Site selection is based, in part, on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Rwanda's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in Rwanda at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers immediately report any security incident to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established protocols for **addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.



## DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

In fulfilling its mandate to share the face of America with host countries, the Peace Corps is making special efforts to assure that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent history. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other despite our many differences.

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In Rwanda, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in Rwanda.

Outside of Rwanda's capital, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Rwanda are justly known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community in which you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Rwanda, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

### Overview of Diversity in Rwanda

The Peace Corps staff in Rwanda recognizes the adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During pre-service training, several sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. We look forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, and sexual orientations, and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who take pride in supporting one another and demonstrating the richness of American culture.



## **What Might a Volunteer Face?**

### **Possible Issues for Female Volunteers**

Traditional gender roles are very distinct in Rwanda. Generally, women are expected to show deference to men and do most of the housework. Unfortunately, sexual harassment (i.e., unwanted sexual comments) is common and Volunteers develop a variety of means to cope with this issue. As a Volunteer, it is important to stand up for your rights and beliefs as a person while still being culturally sensitive. Female Volunteers should expect curiosity from host country friends regarding their marital status and whether they have children and, if not, why. The Peace Corps also supports a Peer Support Network (PSN) to help Volunteers support each other with ideas and skills to cope with the stress of sexual harassment.

### **Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color**

The average rural Rwandan assumes that all Americans are white (Caucasian). With this assumption, Volunteers of color might expect people to react to them differently. White Volunteers, as well as Volunteers of color, may receive special attention, both positive and negative, including being harassed for money, especially in public areas. Non-Africans in Rwanda are called *abazungu* (the plural of *umuzungu*, or “foreigner”). Volunteers of Asian descent may be called *umushinwa*, or Chinese, because the Chinese have had a presence in Rwanda for many years. Some Volunteers of African descent have found it easier to gain acceptance into their communities and others have found integration more challenging because they are held to the standards of HCNs (especially PCV females) than to the standards of foreigners; however, many are considered *abazungu* because they are not sub-Saharan African. Over time, however, as communities come to know the Volunteers, they are referred to by name instead.

### **Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers**

The Rwandan culture has great respect for age. As a senior Volunteer, people may offer to do things for you as a sign of respect.

### **Possible Issues for Married Volunteers**

Married couples have served very successfully in Rwanda. They tend to be well accepted as the social norm is to be married by the time you are an adult. Married Volunteers are almost always questioned about their lack of children, as childbearing is one of the most important and normal parts of married life in Rwanda. Married couples may also face curiosity and/or judgment if they perform different gender roles than are culturally expected.

### **Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers**

While homosexuality is not technically illegal in Rwanda, there are no laws to protect individuals from harassment or discrimination. It is not uncommon for LGBT Rwandans to be arrested and imprisoned under various laws regarding public order and morality. Same-sex marriages or unions are not allowed, as only marriages between one man and one woman are recognized. Many Rwandans have beliefs about homosexuality similar to those of many Americans in the 1940s and 1950s. It is important for gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteers to know about these conservative attitudes to be able to live and work productively in Rwandan communities. Former Volunteers in Rwanda have reported that they could not publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation for fear of negative repercussions and safety risks. The Peace Corps suggests that anyone wishing to discuss this subject do so in confidence with a Peace Corps staff member. The medical office can provide confidential counseling and help connect you with the gay and lesbian support group for returned Volunteers.

A recommended resource for support and advice prior to and during your service is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender U.S. Peace Corps Alumni website at [www.lgbrpcv.org](http://www.lgbrpcv.org).

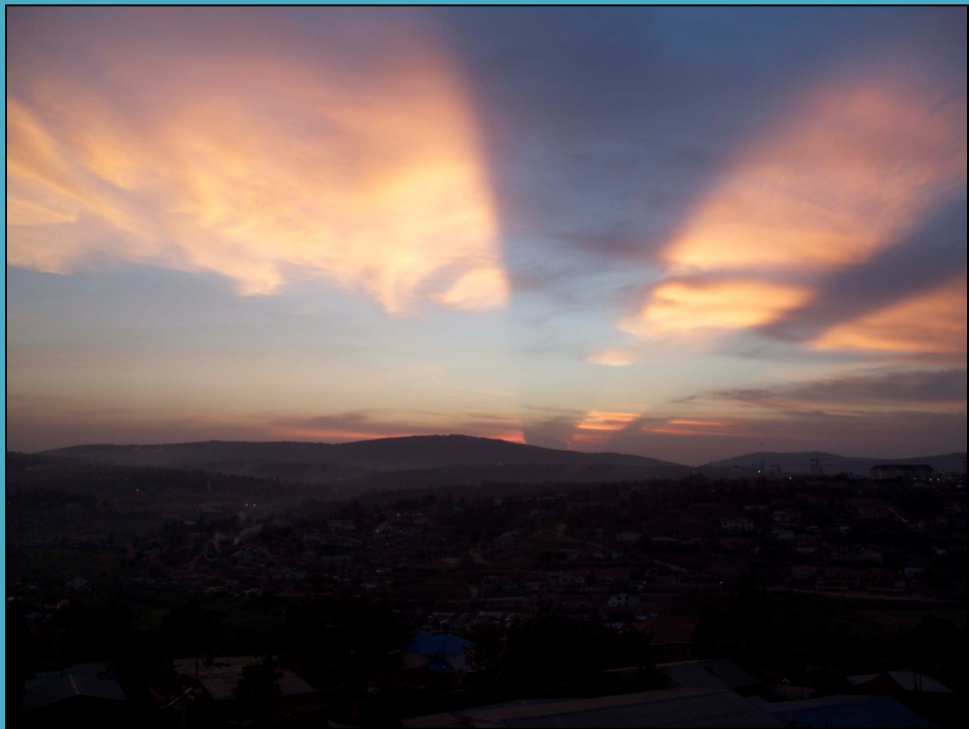
### **Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers**

There are a number of religious groups in Rwanda. The most numerous are the Roman Catholics (56 percent), Protestants (26 percent), and Adventists (11 percent). Other groups include Muslims, who account for about 5 percent of the total population, and about 2 percent who profess no religion at all. A very small number of people practice indigenous religions exclusively, but it is believed that some adherents of other faiths incorporate traditional elements into their own practice.

### **Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities**

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Rwanda without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/ Rwanda staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

Rwandans who are physically challenged are generally not accorded the same human dignity as other Rwandans. Regardless of the nature of the physical challenge, social services are generally lacking for these Rwandans.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Rwanda and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Rwanda.

### **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Rwanda?**

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

### **What is the electric current in Rwanda?**

The local current is 230 volts/50 hertz. Check the power pack or sticker on electronics to make sure their ratings go as high as 240 volts (most battery-operated gear does). Small electrical appliances that cannot take 220–240 volts can generally be used with a voltage transformer, or a voltage stepper. Some Volunteers' houses have electricity and the majority of Volunteers have easy access to an electricity source. The Peace Corps suggests that you bring a Rwandan-appropriate adapter (two circle prongs, commonly called a "French"-style plug). Electric clocks will not keep time because of different cycles. There are power surges and fluctuations, as well as outages, which take a toll on equipment.

In general, expect that you will have access to electricity but, in case you don't, it is wise to bring rechargeable batteries and a small solar charger.

Please note: The terms "adapter," "converter," and "transformer" are sometimes used to mean different things. Here, an "adapter" is used to change the plug so it physically fits into the wall socket. A "transformer" is used to increase or decrease power levels, such as from 230 volts to 110 volts. A "converter" is used to change power, usually from AC (wall) to DC (battery) or vice versa. Sometimes, however, the term "voltage converter" is used to mean a voltage transformer.

### **How much money should I bring?**

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover your expenses. Volunteers often wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs. Extra cash can be stored in personal envelopes in a safe at the Peace Corps/Kigali office; this money can be accessed during office hours. Also, keep in mind that larger (50s, 100s) and newer (2006 or later) bills will have better exchange rates. Some places do not accept 100s printed before 2006.

Credit cards use is extremely limited in Rwanda (only the most upscale hotels and some tourist services accept them), but they can be useful for travel in neighboring countries or for purchasing tickets online. It is possible to withdraw money from a Visa credit card for a fee at a few locations in Kigali. Only local Rwandan debit cards are accepted in Rwanda, but U.S. or international debit cards can be useful when traveling to other countries. Western Union does exist but it can be costly to have money wire-transferred. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that suits your own travel plans and needs.

### **When can I take vacation and have people visit me?**

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

### **Will my belongings be covered by insurance?**

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

### **Do I need an international driver's license?**

Volunteers in Rwanda do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus

or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

### **What should I bring as gifts for Rwanda friends and my host family?**

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away.

### **Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?**

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 10- to 12-hour drive from the capital.

### **How can my family contact me in an emergency?**

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services (OSS) provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 855.855.1961, then select option 2; or directly at 202-692-1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the OSS duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 855.855.1961.

### **Can I call home from Rwanda?**

Yes. All cell phones can make international calls, usually costing between 5–20 cents per minute to call the United States. Many Volunteers find it easier to call their families and ask their families to call them back. Cell phones in Rwanda can receive international calls at no cost to the receiver. Personal overseas calls cannot be made from the Peace Corps office. Volunteers must use locally available public phones or cellular phones for all personal calls. Most large cities and provincial capitals have a domestic telephone system; regional centers and some large cities provide overseas telephone services. With the

increase in Internet connectivity and quality, some PCVs find they can use programs like Skype to communicate with their friends and family at a reduced cost.

### **Should I bring a cellular phone with me?**

You can bring a cell phone if it accepts a SIM card and is unlocked. SIM cards are cheap and easy to find in large cities. It is also easy and relatively cheap (\$15–\$30) to buy a cell phone in Rwanda. It's recommended that trainees purchase cell phones right away since that is the main form of communication during pre-service training. If you plan on purchasing a cell phone in-country, make sure to bring some American cash so that you have sufficient funds in the beginning to purchase one. If you bring a cell phone that accepts a SIM card, it must be unlocked. Trainees will not be given time during pre-service training to unlock cell phones. Unlocking a cell phone, however, is easy and relatively cheap to have done in the capital.

### **Will there be email and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?**

There are now cybercafés in major towns that provide Internet access, and, in most towns, Internet is also available at the post office. However, Volunteers can access email in the Information Resource Center at the Kigali office on a time-available basis. Some Volunteers may choose to bring a laptop computer; however, access to reliable electricity cannot be guaranteed and, as with any valuable, there is the threat of theft, loss, or damage. Trainees are given the opportunity to purchase USB-style modems before departing for pre-service training. These modems usually cost \$25–\$35. If you want to purchase a modem in Kigali before going to pre-service training, you should bring extra American cash to cover the cost.

IPads, Android-based tablets, and other non-Windows or Apple systems are not able to be hooked up to the modems available here. Linux-based system can sometimes work with these modems, but require a free USB port and the proper driver, which may not be readily available.

# PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Rwanda and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Rwanda.

## Absolute Requirements

- Official Peace Corps passport
- Yellow World Health Organization Immunization card
- Extra passport photos (at least 10) with white background
- 3-month supply of all prescription medications
- 2 pairs of eyeglasses (if needed)

Please Note: Thin plastic bags, like the ones used at grocery stores, are not allowed to be brought into Rwanda. While bag searches are rare, if found customs will confiscate the bag, and sometimes its contents. Thicker plastic bags (like zip-top bags) are OK.

## General Clothing

You may find that the clothing you bring from home will suffer more wear and tear than usual. Fortunately, used clothing markets abound in Rwanda, even in smaller towns, so it is not necessary to bring two years' worth of clothes. Keep in mind that cleanliness and presentation are really important in Rwandan culture. The more put together and professional you are the more respect you will receive.

### Men

- 2-3 pairs of nice pants (khakis/dress)
- 1-2 pairs of jeans/comfy pants
- 1-2 pairs of shorts (appropriate to wear when playing sports)
- 3-4 dress shirts
- 2-3 other shirts
- 1-2 ties
- 1 sweater
- 1 rain jacket



- 1 warm jacket
- Socks
- Underwear
- Swimsuit

### **Women**

- 2-3 pairs of nice pants
- 1-2 pairs of jeans
- 1-2 pairs of athletic pants (shorts aren't appropriate; no knees)
- 2-3 skirts (below the knee)
- 1-2 dresses (below the knee)
- 3-4 dress shirts
- 2-3 other shirts
- 1-2 cardigans
- 1-2 scarves
- 1 rain jacket
- 1 warm jacket
- Socks
- Underwear
- 1-2 slippers
- Swimsuit

### **Shoes**

Durable shoes are an essential investment. Shoes will wear out more quickly in Rwanda than you are accustomed due to all the walking you will do and the volcanic terrain in some regions of the country.

- One or two pairs of hiking/walking shoes or boots
- One or two pairs of sneakers or running shoes
- Two pairs of comfortable dress shoes
- Dress sandals
- Rubber sandals/shower shoes

### **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

A range of basic hygiene items is available in most towns and cities; however, if you have strong personal preferences, bring those brands.

- Deodorant (if you prefer the stick kind, which is not available locally)
- Contact lens solution (available locally but very expensive); Peace Corps does not provide this
- 3-6 month supply of any prescription drugs you take, including birth control pills
- Good-quality sunscreen (with a high SPF)
- Tampons or sanitary pads (some are available locally but are very expensive)
- Aloe or after-sun lotion (Peace Corps does not provide this)
- Nail clippers/nail file
- Razors
- Towel(s)/washcloth(s)
- Shaving cream (hard to find here and expensive)
- Pumice stone/foot scrubber
- Makeup (hard to find and expensive)
- Mouthwash (not available here)
- Floss (PC Medical provides some, but you may want better quality)

## **Electronics**

Some volunteers have electricity in their homes and many have at least access to a local source of electricity, but keep in mind that this is not guaranteed.

- Rwanda-appropriate adapter (two circle prongs)
- Rwanda-appropriate converter (recommended, but not necessary)
- Personal laptop (recommended, but not necessary)
- Unlocked cell phone that accepts SIM cards
- Digital camera (recommended, but not necessary)
- Shortwave radio/portable radio (can purchase here also)
- iPod/music device (optional)
- Kindle/eBook reader (optional)
- External hard drive (optional)
- 2-3 flash drives (optional)

## **Recreational and Entertainment**

- Art supplies
- Games/puzzle books/cards
- Novels
- Sports equipment
- Camp/hiking gear

### **Miscellaneous**

- Pictures from home of your family, friends, pets, seasons of the year, etc.
- Pens and pencils, stationery, and notebooks
- Alarm clock
- Solar calculator (essential for small enterprise development Volunteers)
- Solar batteries and recharger
- Sewing kit
- Knives (available locally but of poor quality)
- Plastic storage bags and containers
- Duct tape
- Peeler, grater, etc.
- Tools such as a Leatherman knife
- Packaged sauces, seasonings, drink mixes, and spices (spices are hard to find and expensive)
- Potholders
- Solar shower
- Work gloves
- Cash (most Volunteers bring \$200–\$500 for travel and vacation)
- Credit card and/or ATM card
- At least 10 passport-size photos of yourself for visas, work permits, etc. (Note: These photos are a must)
- U.S. and world maps
- U.S. stamps (you can often have letters mailed by those traveling back to the U.S.)
- Checks from a U.S. bank account (handy for ordering things from home)
- Day planner
- Nalgene or aluminum water bottle

- Sunglasses/visor
- Bed sheets (These are not provided; you will need them for pre-service training)
- Towel(s)
- Collapsible bag/tote bags

# PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items will be relevant to everyone, and the list does not include everything you should make arrangements for.

## Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Counseling and Outreach Unit at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 1-855-855-1961, then press 2; or directly at 202-692-1470).
- Give the Peace Corps' On the Home Front handbook to family and friends.

## Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that your luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish your service, so if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

## Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a three-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

## Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

## Personal Papers

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

## **Voting**

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

## **Personal Effects**

- Purchase personal property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

## **Financial Management**

- Keep a bank account in your name in the U.S.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- Execute a Power of Attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961, extension 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

## CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

This list of numbers will help connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You can use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the toll-free number and extensions with your family so they can contact you in the event of an emergency.

**Peace Corps Headquarters Toll-free Number: 855.855.1961, Press 1 or ext. # (see below)**

Peace Corps' Mailing Address:                      Peace Corps Headquarters  
1111 20th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20526

Questions About:	Staff:	Toll-Free Ext:	Direct/Local #:
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement	x1840	202.692.1840
Country Information	Jason Beach Desk Officer / (Rwanda & Kenya) rwanda@peacecorps.gov	X1840	202.692.1840
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or other travel matters:	CWT SATO Travel	x1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	x1840	202.692.1840
Medical Clearance & Forms Processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	x1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)	Seven Corners	N/A	202.692.1538 800.335.0611
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Financial Operations	Office Of Volunteer and PSC Financial Services	x1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney, Staging (Pre-Departure Orientation), and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging <i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>	x1865	202.692.1865
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Office of Special Services	x1470	202.692.1470